

Guide To Great Gear

New Scouts and parents unfamiliar with Scout camping frequently have questions about the gear that will be needed and aren't always sure where to find information or who to ask. This guide will help you learn about the more important gear a camper will need. Much of this gear has the potential to be the more expensive pieces which makes it important to be well informed before making a buying decision.

This guide will discuss the following equipment:

1. Sleeping Bag
2. Sleeping Pad
3. Water Bottle
4. Footwear
5. Rain Gear
6. Backpack
7. Summer Camp Gear

High quality gear can be obtained locally at places like [Cabelas](#), [Canfields](#), [Scheels](#), and at other retailers either online or in the store. Watch the web sites for sales to get the best deals. Excellent gear can also be found online at www.rei.com and www.campmor.com. There are many other online outfitters that are also very good places to shop. Some choices can even be found at discount retailers like Walmart.

[Alps Mountaineering](#) has frequent sales at www.scoutdirect.com and a very good discount program available to Scouts and Scouters. They offer a 45% discount if you first register with them at www.scoutdirect.com. The program applies to backpacks, sleeping bags, sleeping pads, and tents. They do not share your information with others and do not send you email or junk mail.

For a complete list of camping equipment needs see the packing lists on the Troop 308 website. These lists can be used for each of the different types of camping the Troop does (weekend camping, summer camp, winter camping, high adventure).

Packing Lists - <http://www.troop308omaha.com/camping.php>

1. Sleeping Bag

When it comes to selecting essential equipment, the best place to start is with a good quality sleeping bag. Scouts use a lot of energy on Troop campouts which makes it important to get a good night's sleep. They camp in all kinds of weather and a good sleeping bag quickly becomes one of your best friends.

The main features to consider when choosing a sleeping bag are temperature rating, shape, and type of insulation. Initially, choose a sleeping bag that will provide you good 3-season comfort. There are things that can be done later to adapt to winter camping but a good quality 3-season bag is all that is needed to start with.

Beware. The temperature rating on any bag is not a comfort rating. A sleeping bag's temperature rating typically indicates the lowest temperature at which it will let the “average” person sleep. For example, with a 30° bag, you should be able to sleep in 30° air temperature, but NOT necessarily comfortably. Comparing different bags can be difficult because there is no standard measurement rating in the US. That means a 20° bag from one company may not provide the same warmth as a 20° bag from another. There is however a European standard, called EN13537, which allows bags to be compared directly. Bags labeled with EN 13537, or just simply EN will have greater reliability with the temperature rating.

There are other variables to consider though that will affect the warmth of any sleeping bag. Factors such as what you plan to wear when you sleep and what type of sleeping pad you use will also affect its performance. To sleep comfortably though it is a good idea to add at least 10 degrees to the rating and use that as a guide.

Sleeping bags are available in two different types of insulation – synthetic and down. Bags insulated with down will be much lighter than synthetic filled bags and compress much smaller making them easier to fit into a backpack. Down is very warm. However, down loses all of its insulating ability if it gets wet. Synthetic insulation can still keep you warm even if it gets wet. Wet down takes much longer to dry than synthetics and is also much more expensive. Most Scouts have a sleeping bag with synthetic insulation, but there are positives and negatives with either choice.

The third point to consider is that sleeping bags come in rectangular and mummy styles. A rectangular bag provides more space to move around in but also provides more space that your body needs to heat. The mummy bag is a more efficient choice for winter camping but can feel confining, especially to an adult. A mummy style bag will tend to be lighter which is always a consideration when backpacking on a high adventure trip like Philmont, but Scouts are not eligible to attend high adventure trips until they are fourteen years old. So in the beginning you might choose to focus on cost and comfort more than weight, but it also might mean buying another sleeping bag at age fourteen or beyond.

2. Sleeping Pad

The underside of a sleeping bag typically does not provide significant insulation because body weight crushes the loft of the insulation material. This makes it necessary to use a pad or other less crushable insulation between the sleeper and the ground, especially in cold weather. The cheapest option is a simple closed cell foam pad. These perform well, are inexpensive, and are available at typical discount stores. An accordion style foam mat is another good choice, though more expensive. It packs easily and can be found at most outdoor equipment stores. Another excellent choice is a self-inflating sleeping pad (ThermaRest style). These pads are popular and are also available at outdoor equipment stores.

Do not use an inflatable air mattress. They place too much air between the camper and the ground. An inflated air mattress will be the same temperature as the external air and does not provide any insulation. The self-inflating pads are filled with insulating foam to provide both warmth and comfort. (Closed cell foam pad, \$8, Walmart) (Self-inflating pad, \$50+)

3. Water Bottle with carabiner (both required on any campout)

This is not an expensive item but it is one of the most important. A Scout needs a water bottle and should have it with them or within reach at all times. There are many different sizes and kinds of water bottles available but in general any 24 oz. or larger Nalgene or Camelbak style water bottle is fine. No disposable plastic bottles. It must be able to be secured to a belt loop with a carabiner clip and must also have the carabiner clip. No one should go anywhere, especially at summer camp, without a water bottle. Plastic or metal bottles are equally fine. (\$10-\$15)

4. Footwear

It is recommended that Scouts not wear typical athletic footwear to camp outs, especially if they want to keep those shoes looking good. Camp activities in general are not kind to shoes. A good hiking boot or shoe is always a good choice. They are durable, provide good footing on rugged terrain, and are available in a variety of low, mid, and high cut styles. The low cut styles look a lot like athletic shoes but are built to provide better foot support and durability than athletic shoes. They are also lighter than boots which has a lot of appeal with Scouts.

Athletic shoes are not permitted on winter camp outs no matter how nice the weather is expected to be. But even in good summer weather the morning dew can be heavy and feet are going to get wet in athletic shoes. Waterproof shoes or boots are recommended but not required. After market waterproofing treatments can be applied to most footwear after purchase. It is also better to break in a new pair of shoes or boots at home instead of at camp. You will enjoy camp a lot more that way.

5. Rain Gear

For weekend campouts and summer camp a poncho will be fine. They are inexpensive and Scouts don't outgrow them. Don't scrimp too much though. The 99 cent emergency ponchos aren't durable and don't make a good long term choice.

When buying any type of rain gear be sure it is waterproof and not just water resistant. There are many fabric and material options available (PVC, vinyl, nylon, Dry-Plus, HyVent, Gore-Tex, etc.). Some are very pricey (Gore-Tex) and many others are much more thrifty but still retain excellent water repellency.

If you decide to purchase a rain jacket and pants, buy them a little large because Scouts are still growing. PVC and vinyl are acceptable materials for ponchos but are not good choices for jackets or pants. PVC and vinyl cause the user to sweat so much that the inside of the garment will be as wet as the outside.

High adventure camps have different needs however. Northern Tier does not allow ponchos and **requires** a good quality hooded rain jacket in order to attend. Wearing a poncho could make it difficult or impossible to swim if a canoe were to capsize. Rain pants, though not required, are highly recommended.

Philmont discourages ponchos because they can be ineffective when carrying a backpack in windy, cold mountain conditions. It is important to keep all of yourself dry under those circumstances, not just your

torso. Ponchos don't keep you warm either, so you would also need to pack a windproof jacket. You would then be carrying two garments when one could perform both roles and lighten your load.

6. Backpack

First of all, it is important to understand that backpacks made for camping and hiking are not the same as those used by students to carry books at school. Not even close.

Campers and hikers can choose between two types of backpack, internal or external frame. External frame packs are those with a framework on the outside. They are designed to carry large loads on well-established trails without a lot of brush or narrow passages to move through. An internal frame pack is ideally suited for trips where balance is critical for carrying loads over rough trails. They are lighter and provide better balance.

Nutshell: Internal frames dominate the market at this time and nearly every scout uses an internal frame. Smaller backpackers (like young scouts) benefit from internal frame backpacks because of the improved balance.

It is not necessary to start out spending a lot of money on a premium backpack. A high end backpack isn't truly necessary unless going on high adventure but a backpack of some kind is still good to have for camping. It just doesn't have to be expensive. If you watch for online sales though, you can often find high quality backpacks at good sale prices.

Also consider that a good backpack needs to be fitted to the user. All of the high quality internal frame backpacks are adjustable to different torso sizes. Online sellers have instructions available to assist you in determining the correct pack size utilizing measurements of the hiker. Many packs come in different models that each covers a different range of sizes. One model might be suitable for shorter scouts while the companion model might be best suited for taller scouts.

If the pack is expected to be used for backpacking trips, then it must fit the hiker *at the time of the trip*. Younger Scouts are still growing and can quickly outgrow a correctly sized pack. That might not matter a lot as long as it isn't being used for long hikes but is something to consider if high adventure trips like Philmont can be expected after turning 14 years old. Backpacks can be rented at Philmont but selection may be limited.

7. Summer Camp Gear

Summer camp has its' own needs for gear that isn't used at other times of the year such as cots and mosquito netting. However, for a complete list of all suggested summer camp gear see the [summer camp packing list](#) on the Troop website.

Cot

Summer camp is one time each year when Scouts will use cots to sleep on. The Mid-America Council's summer camp at Camp Cedars provides wall tents on elevated wooden platforms for campers to spend the week and this is when Scouts will use cots. Cheaper cots are going to be heavier cots, but there is no

need to spend a lot on one because they will never be part of any backpacking trip. If you want to spend more to get a lighter or larger model, go right ahead. Cots cannot be used on regular weekend campouts though because there is not enough room for two of them in the Troop tents and because the legs of a cot would eventually poke holes in the floors of the troop tents. The tent floors at Camp Cedars are wooden. (Cots as low as \$35, Walmart)

Mosquito Net

The tents at Camp Cedars are canvas and do not zip closed with bug netting like a modern nylon tent does. Bugs can come and go as they please. It is much more pleasant to be able to sleep at night without the aggravation of mosquitos buzzing around you. (The heat is enough.) The outdoor equipment suppliers sell a rectangular version of netting that can hang in the tent and encloses one entire cot. (Coghlan's Rectangular Mosquito Net, \$15)

Tarp

The mosquito net keeps all the flying things away, but bugs crawl too. Most Scouts at summer camp will first lay a 6x8 tarp on the floor under their cot to keep everything else out. Without the tarp or other barrier a Scout will awaken in the morning to the sight of spiders (or whatever else came through the cracks in the floor) on the inside of the mosquito net with the Scout. (\$5, Walmart or Menards)

Gear Bag

Backpacks are nice for most weekend campouts but for summer camp a gear bag that unzips across the top of its entire length can make it much easier to find an item buried somewhere inside a week's worth of gear. This is more of a convenience item and not required. A large gear bag with plenty of outside zip up pockets can be purchased for as little as \$25 (Walmart).

Final Thoughts

Footwear and backpack purchases might best be done in a bricks-and-mortar store with assistance from someone trained to help you get the best fit. There are special considerations to be made in selecting footwear destined for use on long backpacking trips and hikes. The boot needs to fit in a certain way. Backpacks must have the proper fit in order to work effectively as well. However, online purchases can often save you money. You can learn how to fit boots and packs yourself but that is beyond the scope of this guide. Refer to the available online guides.

For a complete list of all recommended gear, see the packing lists on the Troop 308 web site at the link provided below. If you still have questions contact the Scoutmaster or an Assistant Scoutmaster.

Packing Lists (Weekend campouts (includes Winter camping) and Summer Camp list):

<http://www.troop308omaha.com/camping.php>

Last updated: July 12, 2013